

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**SUPREME COURT CHIEF JUSTICE URGES GOVERNOR TO RESTORE
BUDGET CUTS TO PROBATION SERVICES AS A MATTER OF PUBLIC
SAFETY**

Chief Justice Thomas R. Fitzgerald of the Illinois Supreme Court has released the contents of a letter he wrote to Gov. Pat Quinn urging him to restore severe budget cuts to probation services, saying the current level of state funding is “dangerously inadequate.”

The Chief Justice wrote the letter on September 1 to “respectfully request your restoration of funding to a level that allows probation to do its critical work for Illinois’ citizens and communities.”

In the budget approved by the Governor, funds appropriated to the Supreme Court for community-based probation programs in 2010 totaled \$36,485,500 – a 44 percent reduction from the 2009 allocation. The reduced 2010 allocation follows a 2005 budget cut of 13 percent for probation services, which despite repeated requests by the Supreme Court, has never been restored.

“The practical effect of diminishing appropriations is that probation officers must be laid off, criminal offenders sentenced to probation receive inadequate or no supervision, and the public safety is thereby severely compromised,” the Chief Justice wrote.

The Chief Justice said he is aware that the state’s economic difficulties are more serious than any he has known in his 30 years of public service and is sensitive to the heavy burden the Governor bears in distributing limited fiscal resources.

“I make this request only after careful deliberation and out of the most grave concerns for the public safety of Illinois’ citizens,” the Chief Justice wrote.

The letter to the Governor is not the first time the Chief Justice has made an impassioned call to government leaders about the value of effective probation services in making communities safe and saving individuals.

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Probation Services

Add One

Earlier this year, the Chief Justice, who has served as Presiding Judge over the Criminal Division of the Cook County Circuit Court, appeared before the Appropriation Committees of both the House and the Senate and invoked the visionary work of the late Criminal Court Judge Earl Strayhorn. Chief Justice Fitzgerald described Judge Strayhorn as “the master of changing lives by the way he used probation” and urged the proper funding of probation in his name.

“There is a national consensus building that encourages implementation of new strategies and tools to fight crime – strategies that are less dependent on incarceration as the first solution to manage offenders,” the Chief Justice wrote to the Governor. “Part and parcel of those strategies is the delivery of targeted community based probation programs, about which, Illinois courts and probation departments can boast of much progress.

“However, to continue that progress, probation must be provided with a base of adequate resources. Thus, I respectfully request your restoration of funding to a level that allows probation to do its critical work for Illinois’ citizens and communities.”

There are 65 probation departments throughout the state of Illinois, and the Illinois Supreme Court reimburses the counties for 60 to 65 percent of the salaries of probation officers through the Court’s annual appropriation passed by the General Assembly and signed by the Governor.

The severe cutbacks in probation funds have meant significant staff reductions across the state, which will have a direct correlation on public safety.

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(FOR MORE INFORMATION: Contact Joseph Tybor, press secretary to the Illinois Supreme Court, at 312-793-2323)